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May 2002

Book Review: *General Crook and the Western Frontier* by Charles M. Robinson III

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Tate, Michael L., "Book Review: *General Crook and the Western Frontier* by Charles M. Robinson III" (2002). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 48.

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Published in *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

Published by the Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

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General Crook and the Western Frontier. By Charles M. Robinson III. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index, xix + 386 pp. \$39.95.

Few frontier military officers could claim a more varied and significant combat career during the second half of the nineteenth century than George Crook. Beginning with service as a young lieutenant in the Rogue River War and the Yakima War of the 1850s, he learned quickly about the weaknesses of an army that suffered from underfunding, congressional neglect, low morale, and petty bickering among its officer corps. Despite his commanding troops during the next three decades in some of the most celebrated Indian wars of the Great Plains and Southwest, he also developed an empathy for his adversaries who suffered from many government abuses he helped expose.

George Crook was a complex man whose name became widely known in his lifetime, and yet he left only a minimal account of his activities. His partially completed autobiography was edited by Martin Schmitt and published in 1946, supplementing two flattering books published by his aide-de-camp, John G. Bourke, and a third volume by war correspondent John Finerty, first published serially. Until now, however, no full-length biography has been available to place this man's life in its

overall historical context. By using a rich and exhaustive selection of archival manuscripts, official military records, and published primary materials, Charles Robinson III has provided the first critical biography of General Crook—both public servant and private man.

The book's most extensive sections properly stress Crook's key roles in the Apache Wars of the 1870s and 1880s and the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877. In both cases, he shifted the usual pattern of frontier warfare by increasingly relying on Indian scouts to campaign against other Indians. The strategy proved successful, but it also brought Crook into conflict with General Nelson Miles who assumed southwestern command just at the end of the final Geronimo campaign. Miles overstepped all bounds of decency by taking full credit for final victory, and the two men remained enemies because of Miles's despicable treatment of the loyal scouts and other peaceful Apache bands.

Crook's crucial role in promoting the 1879 civil rights case of Ponca Chief Standing Bear receives detailed attention, as does his close association with the Indian Rights Association and other eastern reform groups who stood as advocates for Native American people. Unfortunately, like most other white reformers, Crook believed that Indians could only survive by quickly acculturating into mainstream American society, and so he helped promote passage of the catastrophic Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, which began the forced allotment of Indian lands. This excellent biography of General Crook thus offers more than a view of one man's existence; it artfully synthesizes the evolution of federal Indian policy and military conflict during the second half the nineteenth century.

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